Improving the forest cover of the country

402. PROF. SAIF-UD-DIN SOZ: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are taking any measure to improve the forest cover of the country; and

(b) whether the Ministry had taken any innovative methods to make forests richer and productive?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) Yes, Sir. The measures undertaken by Government to improve the forest cover in the country are:

(i) Afforestation Programmes are undertaken by the State Governments/UT Administrations from their own resources as well as with financial assistance from Government.

(ii) Guidelines have been issued to all States/UTs to involve village communities through Joint Forest Management in protection and regeneration of degraded forests.

(iii) Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 has been enacted to regulate diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes.

(iv) A network of protected areas has been established.

(v) Externally aided projects are also being implemented for development and preservation of forests.

(b) Yes, Sir. The National Afforestation Programme is being implemented through an innovative two-tier mechanism—Forest Development Agencies at the Forest Division level and Joint Forest Management Committee at the village level.

Financial assistance to U.P. for increasing production of non-timber forest produce

403. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) the quantum of financial assistance provided to the State of Uttar Pradesh for increasing production of Non-Timber Forest produce including Medicinal Plants during the last three years as also for the current financial year;

(b) the actual amount utilized by the State Government for the purpose during the last three years; and

(c) whether financial assistance provided had been fully utilized, if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) A Centrally Sponsored Scheme "Non-Timber Forest Produce including Medicinal Plants" was under implementation during Ninth Plan for increasing production of Non-Timber Forest Produce including Medicinal Plants. An amount of Rs. 95.87 lakh was provided to the Government of Uttar Pradesh during 2000-01 & 2001-02.

(b) and (c) The amount released has been fully utilized by the State Government.

Permission for production of Bt. cotton on commercial level in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra

†404. SHRI KAPIL SIBAL:

SHRI RAJIV RANJAN SINGH 'LALAN': Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government has given permission to Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra to produce Bt. Cotton on commercial level;

(b) if so, whether it is also a fact that Government have received report about the success of experiments carried out so far regarding the production of Bt. cotton in these States; and

(c) if so, the names of departments to which the said report belongs to and what has been mentioned in the report?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee accorded conditional clearance for commercial cultivation of three Bt. cotton hybrids developed by M/s Mahyco, Mumbai for a period of three years from April, 2002 to March, 2005 in six States namely Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

(b) and. (c) The Performance Reports from the State Departments of Agriculture have not yet been received.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.